

# Planning for the Future . . . continued

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He is now working for a company called ENCOR (Eastern Nebraska Community Office of Retardation and Developmental Disabilities). David works in a group home with three men who have mental and/or physical disabilities. He's been there since September of 2002. "It's an amazing job," he said, "I'm able to help the guys so much more because of my personal experiences."

David did have a few other jobs between that first position and ENCOR and remained in contact with Voc Rehab throughout. "They really helped me define what I wanted to do," he remarked.

After graduation he hopes to move on, perhaps to become a counselor to assist those with marital or family related problems. He feels that in this kind of a position he would be able to concentrate more on the spiritual side of things, which was one of the greatest helps to David in his own struggles.

David is ambitious and determined. He doesn't regret his experiences at all. He said appreciatively, taking nothing for granted, "I've been really lucky that my disorder is manageable...If I deal with it directly I can grow so much, maybe even more than if I didn't have to deal with it." □

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## Planning for the Future

### Omaha Man Pursues Psychology Career.

In September of 1994, David Pursel celebrated his 21st birthday. Shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), quite a challenge for a young man.

He had known there was a problem, and after discovering what it was David and his family could focus on treating it, and he began his journey. In 1995 he went to Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab) in Omaha and met with Deb Dixon, who would become his counselor there.

He remembers starting out at Voc Rehab, and said, "I took these questionnaires which helped me understand what I wanted to do... those were very helpful."

The next step was to determine where his interests lay. They sat down and explored different fields. David was able to single out some areas that were really interesting for him. "It saved me time and energy," he remarked of the process.

David's OCD affected him differently than many. He had an obsessive fear of hurting those he loved, and exercised excessively.

"There's a lot of guilt and shame with OCD." To overcome these fears he has done a lot of spiritual work, and controls the disorder with therapy and very low doses of medication. David has really triumphed over his problems and said, "Face your fear and you're able to laugh at it... after a while."

Working with Deb Dixon was also a big positive for David. "I love her direct style," he said, "She has a lot of compassion and empathy too." Deb was helpful in other ways, too. "I was not very centered, I was confused. It was helpful to have someone whose thoughts were organized." Three months later, David was placed in a job.

He spent six years working with a company called Equifax, doing data entry. Also during that time, David was attending school at Metro Community College. Voc Rehab provided the financial support he needed and also helped with some of the confusing paperwork.

David received his Associate Degree in Graphic Design, and commented, "Voc Rehab was the main reason I was able to get an Associate Degree." Today, David is back in school and plans to graduate with a Bachelor Degree in Psychology in the autumn of 2004.

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David Pursel

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# Lincoln Woman Finds Independence

## Lorie Layman Finds Success at Pizza Hut.

Lorie Layman didn't let her disability keep her from reaching for her goals or get her down. Although she was receiving Supplemental Security Income, (SSI) she felt the need to be more independent. After her mother died, she spent some time living with family members.

They were supportive and encouraging. Eventually, one of Lorie's sisters began to talk with her about getting a job. She thought that it would be a good move for Lorie, and Lorie agreed. "We both felt that it would make me feel more independent," she recalled.

After making the decision to return to work, Lorie was faced with a few challenges. She worked at finding some person or agency to give her the assistance and direction that she would need.

Her sister had another suggestion. She gave Lorie the name of an agency in Lincoln called Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab).

Lorie remembered the agency. She had worked with them years ago, for similar reasons. At that time she was successfully placed in a position and was there for over a year. So she reapplied for services and was told that she would be eligible.

Next she did some testing at Voc Rehab, "To see what kind of job I would do best..." Lorie said. She kept in touch with her counselor and kept her eye out for any opportunities.

Two of the counselors that Lorie worked with were Jenny Caruso and John Bulin. Together, they considered what Lorie would need in a job. "I don't drive," she said, so transportation could pose a problem.

The other consideration was Lorie's disability. She was born with a mild mental handicap and mental health diagnosis. They knew that some work would need to be done to find just the right job.

Since Lorie received SSI benefits, she had to consider making decisions that could alter that income. This can be scary and confusing, so Voc Rehab was there to

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independent."



Lorie Laymen

help her sort it out.

When receiving SSI, there are many things to consider, including health care and cash benefits. Benefits analysis can help people in this situation determine the best plan of action. In addition to Voc Rehab's resources, a contract with Easter Seals allows clients to receive further benefits counseling.

After considering these things, one of her Voc Rehab counselors, John Bulin, suggested that she try Pizza Hut. Lorie agreed to this plan, so he made a few phone calls.

Lorie visited Pizza Hut and it just so happened that they needed a dishwasher. The position had just opened up. The next week, they hired Lorie. She has been working there since August of 2003. "I really like it," she said enthusiastically about her work.

"I contacted Pizza Hut..." John remembered. He explained the situation and shortly thereafter he received a phone call. "They asked me some questions about her and the next thing I knew, they'd hired her!" Pizza Hut has been extremely supportive in the past, and very open to hiring individuals that experience disabilities.

"It's really made me more independent," Lorie remarked. "I have my own apartment." The apartment that she lives in now is just a very short walk to her place of employment, so her transportation barrier was removed while she was gaining independence and contentment. Living on her own is a huge accomplishment and she just loves the freedom it affords her.

Her counselors at Vocational Rehabilitation are extremely pleased with Lorie's placement and have some great things to say about her. John Bulin remarked, "She is definitely motivated to work." He also felt that "She ended up being a real success."

Lorie is pleased with the turn her life has taken. She hopes to remain at Pizza Hut and maintain her newfound independence. She has a great appreciation for the people and organizations that have helped her to obtain it. □

# Careers in Columbus

## Ruth provides for self while caring for others.

Ruth Kuhn was having a good time, celebrating the birthday of a friend and enjoying watching her receive gifts. One of these gifts was a bottle of perfume. Naturally, the woman tried it out, applying just a little. It was too much for Ruth. Her severe asthma began to act up, and just that one little action had her running for the door. She wheezed and had difficulty breathing for the better part of an hour.

Ruth has many sensitive allergies to a number of different products, many of them everyday products that most people encounter frequently. Therefore, after being laid off at the temp agency where Ruth was employed, she knew that she needed a job without the threat of an asthma attack. "I was looking for a job that would limit my exposure..." she remembered.

Just a short time later, Ruth ran into a woman she'd worked with in the past. They bumped into each other at a Workforce Development One Stop. The woman, Marlene Konsel, had recently started working at Vocational Rehabilitation in Columbus. She knew about Ruth's asthma and encouraged her to apply for services. "I told her about the program," Marlene said.

Ruth was a little skeptical at first. "I wasn't sure I qualified," she said. Nevertheless, she decided it was worth a try. She went to Vocational Rehabilitation and they determined that she was indeed eligible for their services.

In 2003 Ruth began to work with Vocational Rehabilitation, taking some skills and interest tests, and also some classes to point job seekers in the right direction. They covered things like interviewing skills and proper attire. "Marlene Konsel in the Columbus office was very helpful," Ruth said.

Marlene remembers working with Ruth. She commented appreciatively, "She was very, very determined to get a job and willing to look at other avenues." In fact,

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were very helpful."



Ruth Khun

Ruth had a number of career options. She received a degree, but found that working in an office setting she was always at risk for another attack. Ruth never knew when someone would show up wearing perfume, for instance.

Marlene was able to give Ruth a few ideas. Among them, the suggestion that Ruth apply at Region V Services. She stayed for five months, learning some new skills and obtaining valuable on-the-job training, but ultimately decided to move on.

One of the other agencies Marlene suggested trying was the League of Human Dignity. Ruth loved helping persons that experienced disabilities, so she made the decision to contact them. It was a great move. Ruth is now a contracted employee with Health and Human Services. She is her own boss, however, those that she serves are consumers of the League of Human Dignity.

Ruth works as a Certified Medication Aide. She assists people with disabilities, helping them to function and perform standard daily activities. She does whatever needs doing, and cheerfully offers them her time and encouragement.

Some duties that Ruth might perform in her capacity are helping people dress, cooking, shopping, and in some cases providing transportation.

Being her own boss allows Ruth the flexibility she needs to raise her family. "I have two teenage children at home and I'm married. It's been fun," she said. She also raises five Parrots and two Cockatiels.

Ruth is extremely happy with her career, and said, "I really enjoy what I'm doing now. The people I work with are just super."

Graciously, she remembers Vocational Rehabilitation as the agency that helped her to reach her goals. "They did a wonderful job," she said, "Marlene and the whole crew were very helpful." □